



The Transom Review
Volume 12/Issue 3

[Phyllis Fletcher & Robert Smith](#)
July 2012

(Edited by Sydney Lewis)



Phyllis Fletcher and Robert Smith. Photo by Serene Careaga, KUOW.

Intro from Jay Allison

Radio used to be ephemera. Now everything lasts forever. Except, perhaps, spot news. Who goes back to listen to the daily top of the hour?

Phyllis Fletcher and Robert Smith do! Their Transom Manifesto breaks down the lowly news spot, which, they point out, can make you famous. It is probably more listened-to than any other moment on the air, and in its fleeting brevity, there is power.

Robert (NPR) and Phyllis (KUOW) show you all the miniature moving parts in a fascinating and delicate dissection of these journalistic sonnets. Their Transom Manifesto is sure to be thumbtacked onto local and national newsroom bulletin boards for years to come. They also give you audio examples from Susan Stamberg, David Green, Mike Pesca, Zoe Chace, Greg Warner, Chana Joffe-Walt, and lots of other Masters of the Minute.

Creativity in a Minute

Nobody gets a Peabody award for a piece under a minute. Reporters don't dream of writing 45 seconds of copy. NPR doesn't even archive its news spots on its website. After they go out on the radio waves, they are gone forever.

But we're here to argue that spots are an opportunity, not a curse. We like to think of them as the research and development arm of public radio. Spots are how you can dip into a new subject. Or update an ongoing story. For new reporters, it's a chance to learn skills and get paid for the first time. For radio veterans, it's a chance to try out new tricks with no risk. As you'll hear in this manifesto, spots can be more wildly creative than feature stories that are ten times longer. We'll show you how to pull it off.

But first, one more argument for the lowly spot. As NPR newscasters like to remind us, the top-of-the-hour newscasts are the most-listened-to "show" in public radio. 26 million people hear at least one NPR newscast a week. NPR's former congressional correspondent Elizabeth Arnold would give reporters this advice: Spots will make you famous. (See [Elizabeth Arnold's Transom manifesto here: \(http://transom.org/?p=52\)](http://transom.org/?p=52))

Shall I compare thee to a newscast spot?

A spot, at its shortest, is a Shakespearean sonnet. 14 lines: a mere 7 sentences.

At NPR, that means the report shouldn't be longer than 45 seconds. At Marketplace, they can have a leisurely 90 seconds. The Public Radio News Directors association gives awards for spots that stretch up to two minutes. But regardless of the length, a great spot follows the old sonnet principles.

- Focus on one subject.
- Use vivid language and concrete examples.
- And if you can get away with it, make sure there's a turn in the piece. (Poets call it the *volta*, a little shift in tone. A question is answered. A problem is solved. Perfect for news.)

So what can transform a run-of-the-mill, just-the-facts spot into journalistic poetry?

We have 7 tips for those 7 sentences.

Tip #1: Do less

The biggest mistake that reporters make with spots is to cram in too much information. They think that because the spot is so short, they need to fill it up with facts and speak faster. This will kill a spot.

You must narrow your focus.

There's a saying at *Marketplace* that a spot should be constructed like a good cocktail: two clear ideas and a twist. If that sounds bland (and you long for more garnish and umbrellas in your cocktail) then listen to what *Marketplace's* Stephen Beard did with this spot from a bank hearing in London.

[Listen to Stephen Beard's spot about banking \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Stephen-Beard-Banker-Hearing-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Stephen-Beard-Banker-Hearing-spot.mp3)

(Audio from American Public Media's *Marketplace* (c)(p) 2009 Used with permission. All rights reserved. To hear the full segment and intro, **go here: (<http://www.marketplace.org/topics/business/fallout-financial-crisis/british-bankers-roasted-losses>).**)

Beard's seven sentences work so well because he has focused and stripped down the story to the essentials. He has his two clear ideas: what happened (the grilling) and why (ritual humiliation). And here comes the *volta*, the intoxicating twist at the end (bankers in a bag with snakes).

Think of everything that Beard did not include. We don't know the bankers' names or what they said. He doesn't include who ran the hearing or speculate about what will happen next or try to give us the history of the financial crisis.

The point of the spot is to explain the theatrics of the hearing and every sentence works toward that goal. The tight focus makes this a good spot, but what makes it great is the writing.

Tip #2: Write Strong

Listen back to the banker spot and think about the script. Beard uses short sentences. There are few adjectives, but he makes the most of them (quivering, white-faced). The hard work is done by verbs. The bankers “squirmed.” The banks were “propped-up.” And Beard knows that people will always remember the last sentence, so he saves the best bit for last.

Spots are so short that you should use the most vigorous, active language you can get away with. Listen to the next spot. It’s not unusual for NPR news to talk about revolutions and attacks, but Susan Stamberg brings that violent imagery to a spot about art.

[Listen to Susan Stamberg’s spot about art \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Susan-Stamberg-Painter-Obit-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Susan-Stamberg-Painter-Obit-spot.mp3)

And don’t bogart all those good lines for yourself. Give the newscaster reading your intro something interesting to say. By the time you start talking, your spot is already a quarter of the way done.

In general, you don’t want to crowd a spot with too much flair. If there’s a gripping story or you have a lot of fantastic tape, then the writing can be spare. But if your words have to do the hard work, then go for it. NPR’s Mike Pesca did this great spot on a memorabilia auction of the original rules of basketball.

[Listen to Mike Pesca’s spot on basketball rules \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Mike-Pesca-Basketball-Rules-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Mike-Pesca-Basketball-Rules-spot.mp3)

Now, it would be hard to listen to 4 minutes of that kind of flashy writing. But a spot is over before you can get tired of the trick. As we’ll hear below, you can get away with just about anything for 45 seconds.

Tip #3: Go Live

All of the reports we’ve heard so far are studio productions. But spots really start to pop when you get out in the world.

If you are at a place where news is happening, then even the shortest description of the scene can be a memorable spot. At NPR, newscasters will often just call reporters in the field and ask them to describe what they see. No script. No fuss.

Here's David Greene from outside the royal wedding in London. He literally just looks around and starts talking for 22 seconds.

[Listen to David Green's spot about the royal wedding \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/David-Green-Royal-Wedding-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/David-Green-Royal-Wedding-spot.mp3)

The newscaster can fill in the details. Your job as a reporter is to make the listener feel like they are there with you. Listen to a master do it. NPR's West Africa correspondent Ofeibea Quist-Arcton recorded this at a protest in Dakar.

[Listen to Ofeiba Quist-Arcton's spot about a protest in Dakar \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Ofeibea-Quist-Arcton-Dakar-Riot-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Ofeibea-Quist-Arcton-Dakar-Riot-spot.mp3)

If you listen closely, tell that this wasn't recorded all in one shot. At the beginning you can hear the fear in her voice; she has long pauses and incomplete sentences. She's just doing the most basic description into her recorder in case she needs it. "Our eyes are still smarting and watering from the tear gas." Then you can hear her compose herself and explain the backstory of what happened and why. In her voice and words, you can hear the dramatic arc of the protest. The important thing is that it sounds live and exciting. Scripting would have killed the drama.

Even if you don't find yourself in a riot or at royal wedding, you can still use this trick. Going live from the scene makes just about any report stand out. Here's NPR's Martin Kaste on skis after a snowstorm in Seattle.

[Listen to Martin Kaste's spot about a Seattle snowstorm \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Martin-Kaste-Seattle-Snow-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Martin-Kaste-Seattle-Snow-spot.mp3)

If you want to try a live spot, remember:

- Don't script it. The live feel is what you want.
- Do it multiple times, at different lengths, so your newscaster has options. Use your senses. What do you see, hear, smell?
- Don't include numbers you can't check or things that might change. Leave that for the intro.
- Most importantly, say where you are standing for the outcue!

Tip #4: Find Characters

The best spots come when you can bring real people into the mix; or just a single person, really. If you can find one compelling story, you don't need anything else. NPR's Tamara Keith has to cover all sorts of boring economic reports, so instead of doing another spot on jobs numbers, she got someone who lived the news.

[Listen to Tamara Keith’s spot about unemployment \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Tamara-Keith-Unemployment-spot-.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Tamara-Keith-Unemployment-spot-.mp3)

And here’s a little secret. All those experts and professors and politicians that fill up the newscasts? They are real people, too. And if you ask the right questions and use the right tape, you can turn a talking head into a real character. When you get someone into a storytelling mode, they’ll tell you a story.

Here’s a very simple trick from NPR’s Zoe Chace. Her expert sounds human from the first cut.

[Listen to Zoe Chace’s spot about factory orders \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Zoe-Chace-Factory-Orders-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Zoe-Chace-Factory-Orders-spot.mp3)

Chace also does a great job of writing in and out of her tape. If you want more than just one cut of a person in your spot, you’ll have to use sentence fragments. Have them finish your sentence, and you finish theirs. A character has much more presence in a spot that way.

Tip #5: Get Real

As a reporter, you will get sent to cover canned events: news conferences, speeches, announcements. Look for the real life moments: a great pause, a sigh, a laugh, or someone choking up. These can make a spot. Scan the audience for someone who is invested in the outcome; use them instead of the speaker. Or grab people after the event. Have them tell you a detail from their life, or show you something.

When I (Phyllis here) heard that the city of Seattle was discussing pedestrian rage, I took the debate out to the real world. At KUOW, where I work, spots can be as long as two minutes, and so I used the time to create a journey.

[Listen to Phyllis Fletcher’s spot about pedestrian rage \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Phyllis-Fletcher-Pedestrian-Rage-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Phyllis-Fletcher-Pedestrian-Rage-spot.mp3)

Phyllis writes:

“The Seattle mayor’s office sent a press advisory that it would hold a news conference on the city’s pedestrian safety enforcement efforts. This immediately started an argument in the newsroom, right down party lines: pedestrians vs. drivers. That argument happens every day on city streets, so the news conference was just an excuse to go out, get the argument, and put it on the air. And break at least one law while doing so.”

Just spend a minute and think: where will this news be felt the most. Marketplace's Gregory Warner had to do a spot on shrimp prices after the gulf oil spill. So on his lunch hour he went hunting for consumers. In fact, in this spot he hits the shrimp trifecta: a shrimp eater, a shrimp fisher, and a shrimp economist.

[Listen to Greg Warner's spot about shrimp \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Gregory-Warner-Shrimp-Prices.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Gregory-Warner-Shrimp-Prices.mp3)

(Audio from American Public Media's *Marketplace* (c)(p) 2010 Used with permission. All rights reserved. To hear the full segment and intro, **go to:** (<http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Gregory-Warner-Shrimp-Prices.mp3>.)

Warner does something nice here. He includes himself asking a question, and what a fantastic question: "What's your shrimp alternative?" Her answer is priceless. Reporter questions are a great way to create a little back and forth drama in a very short timeframe.

NPR's Steve Henn uses the questions nicely for a spot from the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Also note that Henn records his reaction to their answers.

[Listen to Steve Henn's spot about the Consumer Electronics Show \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Steve-Henn-CES-Spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Steve-Henn-CES-Spot.mp3)

This spot is awesome because it combines real people with a live, you-are-there feel.

Tip #6: Tell Stories

So you have your tight focus. And your vigorous writing. You are in the field and you've found real people. It's time to craft a true story.

This is so hard to do in under a minute that you really have to be thinking about the narrative while you are recording in the field. Ask yourself: what is the story I'm in right now? How does it start? How does it end? And to make your life easier, start looking for the shortest little cuts of tape you can use to tell that story.

A classic version of this is the journalistic mystery. Something weird happens and you as the hero reporter figure it out. Bob Moon from Marketplace went out to cover Russian President Vladimir Putin in New York City and he came back with this funny and satisfying spot.

[Listen to Bob Moon's spot about Russian President Vladimir Putin in New York City](#)

<http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Bob-Moon-Putin-in-NY-spot.mp3>

(Audio from American Public Media’s Marketplace (c)(p) 2003 Used with permission. All rights reserved.)

The event was a staged photo op. Moon doesn’t have any sound of Putin. And the news value is questionable. So Moon does something shrewd. He holds the tiny bit of news until the end and starts with the action. Putin shows up at the gas station. Moon posits the mystery, “What was he doing there?” Then it’s just fun until the answer is revealed.

Another form of mini-narrative is finding the conflict. I (Robert, here) went to cover New York City’s St. Patrick’s Day parade for NPR. Mayor Michael Bloomberg was taking heat for making a bad joke about the Irish, and so I went hunting for the conflict.

[Listen to Robert Smith’s spot about St. Patrick’s Day \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Robert-Smith-St-Patricks-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Robert-Smith-St-Patricks-spot.mp3)

Robert writes:

“There is a funny back story to this particular spot. I was going for the NPR record for the amount of natural sound in a spot. So I crafted it to maximize the amount of short sound bites. In the end, I fit 13 actualities, 3 ambience beds and 2 sound posts into 45 seconds. But I still managed to make it a recognizable story.”

Making a scene like this is easier if you have the action in front of you. Just tell the listeners what happened first, what happened next, and how it all turned out. But even without dramatic action, a great reporter can craft a narrative... even out of silence. NPR’s Chana Joffe-Walt did just that from Port of Seattle during the recession.

[Listen to Chana Joffe-Walt’s spot on the Port of Seattle \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Chana-Joffe-Walt-Port-Traffic-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Chana-Joffe-Walt-Port-Traffic-spot.mp3)

So Joffe-Walt turned a simple fact (it’s quiet) into a story (it used to sound like this, then this happened, now it’s like this). Joffe-Walt told us that she had planned to get a tour of the port, but her guide didn’t show up and she was stuck outside the gates with the PR woman. This spot is genius out of necessity.

Tip #7: Have Fun

Despite our pleas for more creative spots, it’s inevitable that newscasts will mostly be filled with short, just-the-facts reporting.

That's okay. It's what newscasts were designed for. And the truth is, the demands of the news are so immediate, so overwhelming, that reporters often have to file with only a few minutes preparation. NPR's fantastic White House Correspondent Scott Horsley will do a half dozen spots in a single day. He told us his personal motto for spots: If you can't make it beautiful, at least make it clear. And if you can't make it clear, at least make it short.

But when you have the time, when the news is slow or the editors are in a good mood, we encourage you to try something different. Have a little fun.

John Stempin is the overnight editor at NPR's newscast unit. And after that last big lottery jackpot, he layered beds of sound to capture the frenzy over the tickets.

[Listen to John Stempin's spot about the lottery \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/John-Stempin-Lottery-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/John-Stempin-Lottery-spot.mp3)

We've heard great spots packed with music, or sound effects, or TV clips.

NPR's Planet Money team is playing around with chatty two-person spots. Here's an explainer on orders for durable goods:

[Listen to Robert Smith and Zoe's Chace's spot about durable goods \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Robert-Smith-Zoe-Chace-Durable-Goods-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Robert-Smith-Zoe-Chace-Durable-Goods-spot.mp3)

There's a little bit of explanatory journalism in there, but mostly it's just refreshing to hear two people joke around in a fairly natural way. The newscast unit loved that spot, but they rejected a similar Planet Money one explaining housing starts.

[Listen to Robert Smith and Zoe Chace's spot about housing \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Robert-Smith-Zoe-Chace-Housing-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Robert-Smith-Zoe-Chace-Housing-spot.mp3)

The newscasters felt the tone of the spot was wrong. It ended up airing on *Morning Edition* instead.

The trick is to figure out if your gimmick matches the subject matter. It's easier to get music into an arts spot than an economics spot. TV and movie clips work better with cultural reporting than disasters. The gimmick should be surprising, and yet feel like a natural fit. When Zoe Chace did a spot on a lawsuit involving rapper T-Pain, you can't believe what you are hearing, but you can't imagine it any other way.

[Listen to Zoe Chace's spot about the rapper T-Pain \(http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Zoe-Chace-T-Pain-spot.mp3\)](http://transom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Zoe-Chace-T-Pain-spot.mp3)

The important thing to take from all of these examples, from this whole manifesto, is that it doesn't take much to break the mold of spot reporting. It's like a little experiment in radio. Change this variable, swap out that one. Play with the voicing, the tone, the soundtrack, the actualities, the writing, or the focus and see what happens. If it works, you shout eureka and get hailed as a genius. If it doesn't work... well, the embarrassment will be over in 45 seconds and you can start hatching a plan for the next great spot.

Thanks to all the reporters who donated spots and advice for this manifesto. As well as the examples you heard, we got help from Marketplace's Mitchell Hartman and Stacey Vanek Smith. We also got great ideas from NPR's Barbara Bradley Hagerty, Dina Temple-Raston, Debbie Elliott, Craig Windham, Russell Lewis and Neda Ulaby. Our spiritual and menu advisor is Cathy Duchamp. Special thanks to NPR's National Desk editor Steve Drummond, who has started a brand new award for outstanding achievements in short reporting, the Eric Hill Spot Award.

About Phyllis Fletcher

Phyllis Fletcher is an editor for [KUOW Seattle \(http://www.kuow.org/\)](http://www.kuow.org/). Before that, she was a reporter. One of her favorite assignments led her to attend a press screening of the satirical movie *Borat* with diplomats from the embassy of Kazakhstan – the former Soviet state lampooned in the film. Throughout the screening, a chagrined diplomat leaned over to stage whisper a personalized commentary track, with information like, “this landscape is not actually Kazakhstan,” “we never treat Jews this way in Kazakhstan,” and “women have equal rights in our country.” He did, though, find the nude wrestling scene hilarious.

Phyllis has won first place awards from the National Association of Black Journalists, Education Writers Association, and Public Radio News Directors, Inc. Phyllis' discovery that a band leader from the 1930s passed for white from her childhood through her death won a Gracie Award—her first statuette. Pretty fancy for public radio.

Phyllis produced her first radio report as an intern, about racial discrimination that happens over the phone. She is a proud graduate of James A. Garfield High School in Seattle. Go, Bulldogs.

One of Phyllis' early pieces was feature here one Transom, [Sweet Phil, From Sugar Hill \(http://transom.org/?p=4531\)](http://transom.org/?p=4531).

About Robert Smith

Robert Smith is a correspondent for *NPR's Planet Money* (<http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/>) where he helps explain the global economy in stories quite a bit longer than a minute. But for years he was NPR's general assignment man in New York filing spots on all kinds of mayhem and madness in the big city.

Robert was part of NPR's political team covering the last three Presidential elections. He also reported from New Orleans on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the Gulf oil spill. Robert has filed spots from a battleship, a ferryboat and the putrid bathroom of a moving campaign bus. He is the honored recipient of NPR's **Eric Hill Spot Award** (<http://www.funwithspot.com/>) for achievement in the art of journalistic brevity.

Selected Comments on Phyllis Fletcher & Robert Smith

Mary Jo West says:

This MUST be sent IMMEDIATELY to every college/university j-school in the country. I hope there will be more articles like this on producing/reporting other kinds of stories. Thank you so much. Mary Jo West Phoenix, AZ

Bradley Campbell (<http://www.ripr.org>) says:

Great post! Questions for Robert: how did you produce and edit the St. Patrick's Day story?

And how did the newscast desk respond to what seems like a labor intensive mix?

Robert Smith (<http://npr.org>) says:

Hey Bradley. I edited and did the multi-panel lay-up of the spot myself. Then had one of NPR's great engineers, Manoli Wetherell, do the mix-down. Newscast doesn't have the time to do complicated mixes, but they will do their best if you include some nice sound and ambi.

Larry Vaughn says:

Very creative use of techniques for the normally boring news. Puts a real human touch to it.

Sean Rasmussen (<http://www.seanrasmussen.ca>) says:

Great article! It has me inspired to tell even shorter stories. It's amazing what you can do in a minute!

John Norman says:

We must at all times remember that instant information is what sets radio apart from any other mass medium. While I can appreciate the public radio orientation of the authors, they ignored the best examples available of how to do a great story in 40 seconds available 24/7.

Set your browser, i-whatever or internet radio to the legendary all-news and news-talk radio stations that still exist in the US and Canada.

Check out WCBS in NY, where Irene Cornell actually knows the meaning of legal brief or KNX in LA where Ron Kilgore has a way with words. WTOP in Washington, KYW in Philadelphia and CFTR in Toronto have their own great crews.

Robert Smith (<http://npr.org>) says:

Guilty! We focused on public radio spots. But I live in New York and am a huge fan of commercial radio. I could (and should) do a whole manifesto on what we can learn from their speed and writing. You forgot some of my favorites though: John Montone and the legendary Stan Brooks from 1010 WINS. At events in New York, I'll hear these guys file 4 times live on the air before I get my mic out of my bag.

Phyllis Fletcher (<http://kuow.org>) says:

Megadittoes! Props to our brothers and sisters in commercial radio. I learned from one of the best: Peter King, CBS News. He gave a workshop to public radio reporters at The Poynter Institute and (gently) derided our doctrine that 40 seconds is short. "Ha!" Quoth he. Also, when I'm live on the air, I rustle my papers like Rush Limbaugh. Totally bit that.

Doug Mitchell says:

Dateline: Dallas. Summer, 2003. Phyllis Fletcher was at KUOW in Seattle. A staff member there recommended Phyllis for an NPR-funded student radio project at the National Association of Black Journalists conference held in that city. Technically,

Phyllis was not a “student.” I respected her recommender. So, I broke the rules and had he come to Dallas to work with us.

We learned during the project that then US National Security Adviser Condeleeza Rice was to speak at the conference. I needed someone to cover that event. Phyllis was already working for a station. I assumed that she could handle it. She did, easily. With an assist from KERA’s Bill Zeeble, she covered the event and cranked out a couple of spots that aired during NPR’s newscasts. (Shout out to John Stempin) Her spots aired that evening and early the next morning. Everyone knows newscasts always need content, 24-7. If you want to become a real reporter (or find out if you even have the chops), start by filing spots, early and often. Before you know it, you’ll be a star. Then, when you want to pitch a piece, editors will know who you are and will listen to your ideas.

[Phyllis Fletcher \(http://kuow.org\)](http://kuow.org) says:

Wow, Doug, what a memory on you! It’s all so true. Go for work that appears to be low-glorry. People will hear you, remember you, count on you, and give you a shot next time. Doug has legions of former students and interns to bear witness! (Any of you now reading this, please chime in with advice for those comin’ up now!) THANK YOU BILL ZEEBLE! I smile every time I hear YOU on NPR!

[Julia Barton \(http://juliabarton.com\)](http://juliabarton.com) says:

So real about the commercial radio guys. I was covering a “town hall meeting” of then-Pres. Clinton’s way out in Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park for WHYI once. Got a ride back with KYW’s Mike Dunn. He was cuing up tape on his Marantz, talking over the air via his cell, putting the cell up to the Marantz speaker to play tape, AND driving at the same time, as I recall. Maybe I held the wheel for a second. Such a pro, but that’s a hard life.

Rob Rosenthal says:

Stand by for a crass commercial: Robert is featured on the latest HowSound talking about “stand-ups” — narrating live in the field. Have a [listen here:](http://howsound.org/2012/06/stand-ups/) (<http://howsound.org/2012/06/stand-ups/>) And, Robert and Phyllis, thanks for this article. Really stellar and incredibly useful.

[Phyllis Fletcher \(http://kuow.org\)](http://kuow.org) says:

A final plea on behalf of your editor.

If your editor cares how your spot sounds, you are a most fortunate reporter. You **may** believe this right now, as you're reading my words. But as Hanz and Franz used to say, "hear me now, and believe me later." Because you may **not** believe me during an edit, when your editor starts to do his or her job: cutting a minute from your work, pushing you for clarity, etc.

Remember: you have been "soaking in it." To you, your spot may be clear and fine and explain everything. Part of your editor's job is to help you make it clear to others, and to focus you when you have attempted to explain more than your newscast would typically handle. Your editor may ask you to let things go—to make one thing clear instead of three. Or to explain three things, but with less detail than you originally intended. Or with fewer twists and turns.

You may feel strongly that it's very important that people understand everything about a story that you understand. You may think it's all really, really interesting. You may be right. For a spot, though, you have to make different choices than for a longer piece. If you make the choices before your editor comes over, you may be happier with the results. If you let your editor make the choices, though, **let** your editor make them. Recognize that that, too, was a choice. Recognize your opportunities to go into more detail elsewhere, and pitch them: a longer piece, a web sidebar, a live shot, a trade journal article. You don't have to leave it on the cutting room floor just because you didn't get it into your spot.

Maybe every sentence of this plea made you say, "but my editor's a ____! He's so ____! Last time he __ I wanted to ____!" You may have issues I'm not addressing, to say the least. I'm merely suggesting an attitude of openness and collaboration in the heat of a newscast deadline—and recognition that the constraints of a spot can make them great when, instead of working against them, you work with them.

Go forth and be brief! 😊

About Transom**What We're Trying To Do**

Transom.org channels new work and voices to public radio through the Internet, and discusses that work, and encourages more. Transom is a performance space, an open editorial session, an audition stage, a library, and a hangout. Our purpose is to pass the baton of mission and good practice in public media.

We invite Guests to come write about their work here to 1) keep the perspective changing so we're not stuck in one way of hearing, 2) let us in on the thoughts of creative minds, and 3) foster a critical and editorial dialog about radio work, a rare thing. Our Discussion Boards give us a place to talk it all over.

We accept submissions for featured audio pieces and for "Sidebar" entries.

-Sidebars are short (500 words or so) essays, rants, opinion pieces, useful advice, etc.

-Submitted audio can be stories, sound portraits, interviews, found sound, non-fiction pieces, audio art, whatever, as long as it's good listening. Material may be submitted by anyone, anywhere--by citizens with stories to tell, by radio producers trying new styles, by writers and artists wanting to experiment with radio. We're looking for things that are less heard, different angles, new voices, new ways of telling, and any other good pieces that haven't found another way onto public radio. Editors evaluate material more by what it does than what it is. Some questions they'll consider:

- On the air, would it keep you by your radio until it's over?
- Is the maker someone of talent who should be encouraged?
- Does it push t the boundary of conventional radio in an exciting way?
- Will it provoke fruitful discussion online?

Staff

Producer/Editor – *Jay Allison*

Project and Design Manager – *Samantha Broun*

Web Wonk – *Barrett Golding*

Web Consultants – *Holly North, Simon Baumer*

Editors – *Sydney Lewis, Viki Merrick*

Tools Column – *Jeff Towne*

Emeritus Web Directors – *Robert DeBenedictis, Jared Benedict*

Emeritus Site Designer – *Joshua Barlow*

Emeritus Web Developers - *Josef Verbanac, Barrett Golding*



ATLANTIC PUBLIC MEDIA

Atlantic Public Media administers Transom.org. APM is a non-profit organization based in Woods Hole, Massachusetts that has as its mission "to serve public broadcasting through training and mentorship, and through support for creative and experimental approaches to program production and distribution." APM has been the creative force behind projects like the Public Radio Exchange (prx.org), The Moth Radio Hour, This I Believe, and others. APM is the founding group for WCAI, the public radio service for Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket. Transom.org receives funding from the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.